

View from the House

Women took centre stage this week as not only did we celebrate Mother's Day on 6 March but also International Women's Day on the 8 March.

In the House we held a debate to acknowledge the anniversary. A key theme is the gender pay gap. In the UK in 2014 this was 14.2%, the latest figures from the Office of National Statistics. This means that in effect women work from 9 November to the end of the year without pay. A shocking statistic.

This has had a direct impact on some of my constituents who worked for Birmingham City Council. Since 2008, Birmingham City Council has paid out £1.1bn in equal pay claims when women were paid less than men for equivalent work. Some women are still waiting for their pay-out. It is taking years to process the hard fought claims. Some claimants have waited since 2012 just for the payment to be processed.

In Walsall Town Centre we gathered to support the women who are affected by the Government's decision to close the Walsall HMRC Office where 37 of 40 staff affected are women. The Walsall Office at Pattison House, Midland Road is expected to close in 2016/17. This has an impact on the service to their customers. A call centre does not provide the institutional and local knowledge that is needed. Worse still many women with caring responsibilities may have to travel to other Centres. This will make it difficult to balance their responsibilities and will increase outgoings such as travel costs. Many are in the lower paid grades and may have to give up their job losing vital skills and career progression. Many stopped to sign the petition which was organised by the PCS and GMB unions.

Some happy news: Capita, who make their Personal Independence Payments (PIP) assessments at Lower Hall Lane, have agreed not to hold any assessments on the 1st Floor. Many constituents with limited mobility told me that they could not walk upstairs. Capita now agree it is inappropriate to use the first floor. Moreover, they have confirmed that people with mobility issues should request a home assessment, which should be granted.

And I was delighted to judge the Mother's Day cards drawn by the 3 and 4 year old children from a local nursery; a lovely idea by Andrea of Bramble Hedge Florists on Beacon Road. The mums of Francesca and Arjun received a bouquet.

Valerie Vaz MP

7 March 2016